



Pierson Computing Connection Inc

Powering Technology for People™

• • • • • When It's Time to Unplug: 8 Strategies for Safe, Efficient Office Computer Installations

by Debra A. Pierson, PMP, Pierson Computing Connection Inc.

Replacing your office computer equipment sounds easy. Millions of non-IT professionals set up PCs at home, so it shouldn't be too difficult to multiply that sequence by 15, 50, or 500 workstations, should it?

On the contrary, replacing and installing computer equipment in a commercial enterprise, especially with sensitive data storage, is an entirely different challenge. But, by understanding the installation process and knowing what questions to ask, you can minimize surprises and transition from old to new technology seamlessly and efficiently.

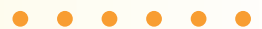
Making IT mistakes is extremely expensive and leaves a business vulnerable to security breaches and customer losses. "For a core customer-facing application such as online banking, the damage can be long-term, due to the impact it has on corporate reputation and the market's trust of the company" (2006 Market Study, mValent, Inc.). Not to mention the negative consequences of the costs to find and fix the problem. It's much wiser to install and configure systems correctly the first time.

As a decision maker or end user, here are *8 Strategies for Safe, Efficient Office Computer Installations*. Once you understand the technical process and its potential for hazards, you'll be better informed on whom to hire and how to avoid significant and costly errors.

- 1. Hire an IT Project Management Professional®.** It's wise to invite an IT professional on board from the earliest discussions about multi-location computer and system replacements. His or her expertise will help avoid serious pitfalls and costly errors. A PMP will coordinate the challenges of schedules, building security for after-hours implementation, software configuration, installation, and disposal of sensitive data.
- 2. Communicate clearly with the end users.** Some questions to ask: How long will the end users be out of productivity, if at all? What are their responsibilities before the installers arrive? Will they experience any loss of data or changes in the way they do their jobs after installation? Each concern should be clearly addressed through emails, in person by the supervisor or owner, and with the installers on the day of installation.



DEBRA A. PIERSON
President and CEO



-
-
-
- 3. Plan, plan, and plan.** When you are affecting the work lives of skilled employees—the real capital assets of your company—every detail needs to be planned and documented. This is where a certified Project Management Professional® is most valuable. Your install team should perform a virtual run-through of every aspect of the installation before the implementation date. Will the IT firm be accessible when problems occur?
- 4. Perform a pilot test.** “It worked in the lab at the IT department, it should work at the office” is not an acceptable excuse for errors. Pilot installations should be planned—at least one for each type of office installation—with two weeks between the pilot installation and the beginning of the major installation. A pilot plan should be documented and all paperwork updated after the pilot to reflect reality.
- 5. Be consistent with all installations.** Businesses need each device installed in the same manner with all the settings uniform, so it’s easier for an in-house IT department to troubleshoot. Inconsistent implementations are usually the result of human error or human troubleshooting without documentation. Installers should be trained to follow procedures exactly, and project plans should provide for as little manual data input as possible to minimize human error.
- 6. Maintain version control in software and procedures.** Halfway through a project, a business might discover that it really needs a later version of the newly installed software (e.g. an updated Microsoft security patch). If the documentation provided by the project office does not record for each serial number what “version” of instructions or software was used for the installation, the IT firm will not know which devices need to be revisited or require a software download. Ask your provider if they are prepared to deal with these types of surprises.
- 7. Document complete inventory information.** Most businesses require detailed inventory of computer equipment by serial number. The best way to ensure accurate inventory is to remove the human error and penmanship factor wherever possible. Scan each piece of equipment when it arrives from the manufacturer and when it leaves the warehouse.
- 8. Eliminate all data on hard drives.** With immense capacities for saving information, disk drives pose security risks when their life span is over. Do you want your customer’s personal information to appear on a refurbished hard drive used by the manufacturer for parts? Or worse, on equipment purchased on eBay? *The only absolute way to remove data is by degaussing or through a Department of Defense certified data wipe process.* Degaussing uses magnetic fields to remove data from the drives, but in the process it also destroys the drives and any residual value of the machines. The Department of Defense data-wipe process is lengthy but preserves the value of the equipment for ancillary purposes.

Your business intelligence—the documents, board meeting minutes, Power Point presentations, PDFs, proprietary information—is the value of your company. Regardless of how extensive or simple the installation appears, be diligent in confirming that the IT firm appropriately documented and destroyed your old intelligence. The complexity of IT infrastructure and the risk of losing information and applications are serious concerns, but these 8 Strategies will prepare you for a seamless information technology transition. ●

About the Author: Debra A. Pierson, owner of Pierson Computing Connection Inc. (PCCi), headquartered in Mechanicsburg, Pa., has 18 years of technical support and project management experience in doing business with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, IBM, and businesses. For more information, visit www.piersoncci.com or contact Deb Pierson at dpierson@piersoncci.com with questions and for advice.